



Frequently Asked Questions About...RTI Problem-Solving Teams

Students at any grade level can sometimes experience significant problems that threaten to derail their progress and even lead to their eventual dropping out of school. Students in crisis are not an anomaly: It is estimated that—in a typical school—perhaps as many as 5% of individuals in a general school population may require intensive RTI intervention supports each year (Christ, 2008). A school's RTI Problem-Solving Team (or 'RTI Team') is the vehicle for assembling customized intervention plans for those students who display the most intensive and serious problems.

The RTI Team is composed of a multidisciplinary group of educators and follows a research-validated structured approach known as the 'problem-solving model' (Bergan, 1995) to understand and analyze student challenges. Distilled to its essence, the problem-solving model requires that a consultant (in this case, the entire RTI Team) and referring teacher(s) work together to (1) identify the student problem in specific, measureable, observable terms; (2) analyze the student problem to uncover underlying functions or reasons to explain why the problem is occurring; (3) implement an evidence-based intervention plan whose elements are logically selected to assist the student; and (4) evaluate the plan on an ongoing basis to determine if it does in fact help the student to reach academic or behavioral goals.

Below are answers to 10 questions frequently asked about RTI Problem-Solving Teams.

1. **How often should the RTI Team meet?** It is recommended that the RTI Team reserve a standing block of time each week for student problem-solving meetings. Many schools set aside 2-3 hours per week, although the amount of time scheduled for meetings will depend on the number of students typically referred in a week to the RTI Team.
2. **Who should serve on the RTI Team?** RTI Teams can be flexible in their membership but should be multidisciplinary (e.g., school counselor, special or general education teachers, etc.). RTI Teams should make a special effort to recruit teachers to increase the team's credibility with classroom personnel. One useful idea is for teams to enlist a larger number of teachers and support staff and to rotate the members who sit on the team each week. By rotating its members, the RTI Team can reduce the weekly commitment required of any single member and thus increase the willingness of teachers and support staff to serve on the team.
3. **How much RTI Team time should be set aside for a student RTI case?** An initial student RTI case should typically not exceed 30 minutes. Follow-up RTI Team meetings often do not exceed 20 minutes. Streamlined, efficient RTI Team meetings are possible provided that the teams have done their necessary advance work to prepare for the actual meetings (e.g., communicating with the classroom teacher(s) to clarify referral concerns; ensuring that important data on the student is collected and brought to the RTI Team meeting).
4. **What is a reasonable number of student RTI cases that can be handled by an RTI Team in a school year?** Experience suggests that a single RTI Team can efficiently manage between 25 and 40 Tier 3 cases in the course of a typical school year. There are several



count on administrators to enforce teacher expectations for compliance with the building's RTI guidelines.

7. **Once an intervention plan has been designed by the RTI Team, how long should that intervention last before the team meets again to evaluate its effectiveness?** An intervention plan should be in place long enough to judge with confidence whether that plan is working. It is recommended that RTI Teams set a reasonable default length of time that intervention plans will be in effect (e.g., 6 to 8 instructional weeks). However, teams should also have the latitude to set longer or shorter intervention timespans based on the facts of the specific student case. For example, a high school may allow 6 instructional weeks to pass before holding a follow-up RTI Team meeting on a student whose intervention targets content-area vocabulary but may schedule a follow-up meeting in only 3 weeks for a student whose intervention addresses disruptive classroom behaviors.
8. **How many intervention plans should the RTI Team implement before deciding that a student has failed to adequately respond to general-education interventions?** Each school district must develop its own decision rules for judging when a series of general-education intervention plans have failed to work and for deciding that a student is not responding adequately to intervention. The foundation assumption of RTI is that students in general education who begin to experience academic or behavioral problems are typical learners and that it is the school's responsibility to find strategies will allow those students to experience success. A district's RTI decision rules for a referral to special education should require evidence beyond a reasonable doubt that a student is not responding to general-education interventions. For many districts, these decision rules require that a minimum of 3 separate intervention plans be attempted—with each intervention plan being tried for at least 6 to 8 instructional weeks—before the school can adequately judge whether a given student has or has not responded to intervention.
9. **How can the RTI Team find the resources necessary to implement intensive student intervention plans?** It is a reality that most schools will need to rechannel existing resources to support RTI. The RTI Team should inventory all resources in the building or district that can be used to support student interventions and assessment. Resources to be canvassed include any staff whose schedule permits them to assist with student interventions or assessment (e.g., reading teacher, school psychologist, paraprofessionals); staff with specialized expertise in such areas as reading instruction or behavior management who can serve as consultants or intervention coaches; commercial materials for academic instruction or intervention; commercial professional development materials for academic or behavioral intervention or assessment, etc. RTI Teams should consult this inventory of intervention and assessment resources at problem-solving meetings when putting together plans for student intervention and assessment.